

# Archives Advice No. 10

## Historical Records

### Considerations for Local Government Officials

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#### Definition of a Historical Record

A historical record is a record (modern or older) which, because of its importance to government or to researchers, has enduring value and is retained permanently. Historical records include more than just the records dating back to the establishment of the government, board minutes, birth, death, marriage, and divorce records, wills and estates. Examples of other records deemed historical are property records, election records, policy and procedure manuals, evaluations of governmental operations, school records, and military and veterans' records, just to name a few.

Local government records may be historical for many reasons. Does the records series provide valuable information on persons, events, subjects? Does the series provide valuable information on the key operations of a significant municipal office? Yes to these questions indicates information that could be particularly important to government and to researchers.

#### Why Should You Care?

There are many reasons to care for historical records. To name a few:

- They protect your rights - Records enable you to vote, buy and sell property, build a home, or operate a business.
- They preserve memories - Records can help you trace a family tree, and they will link you to future generations.
- They help build the future - Records put us in touch with our rich heritage here in Georgia.
- Records document how government takes shape, and the changes that take place in government.

#### Identifying Your Historical Records

Conducting an inventory of records, both paper and electronic, is an effective way to identify permanent (historical) records series as well as any temporary ones. The inventory will identify records series--files that are created, arranged and maintained as a unit because they are related in some apparent way. A form that is clear, concise and carefully designed is a necessary tool to gather and analyze information. Following are steps that will facilitate the inventory process.

#### Conducting the Inventory



#### GEORGIA ARCHIVES

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- Begin with the modern/active office files.
- Use one inventory form per series, if possible
- Continue with files in storage areas (in-house or off-site), in attics or basements
- Do not leave any records out because there is pressure to complete the inventory
- Ask questions of office personnel who work with and are most knowledgeable about use of files

A completed records inventory will enable records managers to determine, through analysis of the data, the nature of and need for a records series, based on the following values for the record, and can be used as the basis for recommending to the governing body a retention schedule:

- Historical - the long-term/permanent value of records to document past events. They generally constitute less than 5-10% of the total records generated.
- Legal - these records are required by law to be kept or are kept in case of litigation or for investigation by the government.
- Fiscal - these records relate to financial business transactions and are mainly for audit or tax purposes
- Administrative - records enable the organization to carry out day-to-day business functions.

More detailed information on conducting an inventory-including a sample Inventory Form- can be found on the Records and Information Management Services web page at [www.GeorgiaArchives.org](http://www.GeorgiaArchives.org).

## Securing Historical Records

Secure your historical records by making sure that they are separated and protected from any threat of being accidentally thrown away, destroyed or stolen. There can be many dangers in the way our records are stored and handled. Even though the threats posed do not make headlines, records and the information they contain are still at risk of being lost. Records need to be kept in a cool, dry, clean, and secure environment that protects them from theft, fire, flood, mold, and unwarranted destruction caused by insect and rodent damage and, in case of electronic media, deletion. Special storage conditions are needed for microfilm, computer tapes, and other non-paper records. Proper storage of records also, regardless of media, facilitates the retrieval process. It is recommended that information of historical value stored on the computer be duplicated or backed-up and stored offsite. Development of a written disaster plan with stipulations on how to handle records if a disaster occurs (all media included) is advisable.

## Who Can Help?

Both Georgia government officials and employees play a part in protecting our records. Listed below are some ways in which the process can be facilitated:

- Pass an ordinance supporting records management in your jurisdiction
- Support attendance at records management workshops for staff with recordkeeping responsibility
- Contact the Records and Information Management Services section of the Georgia Archives at [rims@sos.state.ga.us](mailto:rims@sos.state.ga.us) or call us at 678 364-3790
- Visit our website at [www.GeorgiaArchives.org](http://www.GeorgiaArchives.org)